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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8526

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1255

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 000876

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2027

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SUBJECT: UN ENVOY PEDERSEN, MOHAMAD CHATAH ON 1701 REPORT

REF: BEIRUT 866

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) In a July 16 meeting with the Ambassador that focused largely on Lebanon's internal politics, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Geir Pedersen also talked of the next UNSCR 1701 report. On Sheba' Farms, Pedersen, showing a map, said that the cartographer's work revealed that the area of Sheba' Farms is considerably smaller than the expansionist claims extended by some Lebanese; Sheba' Farms does not include the upper slopes of Mt. Hermon. But newly discovered signed documents reinforce Lebanese claims of sovereignty, Pedersen claimed, dismissing the Ambassador's concern about the 1701 report inadvertently providing justification for Hizballah's armed activities. He said that he did not have new information from the GOL about arms smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border. PM Siniora's senior advisor, Mohamad Chatah, told us separately that the GOL would provide information to Pedersen by mid-week. Chatah said that the Lebanese would propose a tripartite UN-Syrian-Lebanese mechanism for the border. Talking of his consultations last week in Israel, Pedersen said that the Israelis gave no evidence to back up their claims of renewed Hizballah activities south of the Litani River. As Israel had shown evidence of arms smuggling on the Syrian-Lebanese border, Pedersen argued that Israeli intelligence on activities south of the Litani was less conclusive. Moreover, UNIFIL's 400 daily patrols failed to uncover Hizballah military activities. End summary.

NEW INFORMATION ON SHEBA' FARMS:

PROBABLY LEBANESE, BUT SMALLER THAN SOME CLAIM

¶12. (C) The Ambassador called on Pedersen at his home on June 16. Pedersen, barefoot and sitting at a table surrounded by documents and maps, was working on his input into the next UNSCR 1701 report, now being drafted. The UN-hired contract cartographer, he said, had discovered some "very revealing" documents about both the land ownership patterns and probable sovereignty of Sheba' Farms. The cartographer turned up some old maps signed by Lebanese and Syrian officials. Thus, there would be considerable new information about Sheba' Farms included in the next UNSCR 1701 report. But the report would also, Pedersen said, emphasize the "provisional, temporary nature of the new findings," since Lebanon and Syria are responsible for agreeing to their permanent border.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador expressed strong objections to Pedersen's comments. The UN, by commenting on Sheba' Farms sovereignty, risks turning pretext into legal justification for Hizballah's armed activities and even post-facto blessing for last summer's Hizballah aggression against Israel. The cartographer's mandate was to define the geographic scope of the area in question, without asserting sovereignty claims, and perhaps offer some options (per the language in UNSCR 1701) for how to deal with the issue. The cartographer should not have the power to overturn years of Security Council resolutions and establish a new precedent by which contract bureaucrats change borders.

¶14. (C) Pulling out a photocopied map, Pedersen said that the cartographer had, in fact, "done us all a great service" by defining the area. Sheba' Farms does not include the upper slopes of Mt. Hermon or its peak, Pedersen noted; it does not include the area around Ghajjar. Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri (who regularly quips to VIP visitors that he looks forward to hosting them on ski trips to Mt. Hermon once Sheba' Farms are "liberated") "will be disappointed." (While Pedersen did not permit the Ambassador to take a copy of the map, the map showed the eastern boundary of Sheba' Farms as a continuation of the diagonal line defined further south by Wadi Assal, all the way up to the Israeli withdrawal line. This is considerably less than the more expansionist Lebanese claims. At the southwest corner, the line on Pedersen's map appeared at its most southern point to be only about a kilometer from the 1949 Israeli-Syrian demarcation line, leaving a very narrow passage between the rest of the Golan Heights and the Israeli-occupied Syrian "bulge" in the Ghajjar area.)

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¶15. (C) The Ambassador asked Pedersen whether he had previewed with the Israelis how the UN might handle the Sheba' Farms issue in the 1701 report. Evading a direct answer, Pedersen said that, based on his consultations with the Israelis the previous week, it was clear that the Israelis knew that there would be "new information that they don't like" about Sheba' Farms included in the report. The Ambassador repeated his point that it would be deeply damaging to the prospects for peace and security if the UN publishes information suggesting Lebanese sovereignty over Sheba' Farms, without having arranged a workable solution in advance. Pedersen said that his impression was that it would be impossible to get the Israelis to look creatively at Sheba' Farms without having some kind of resolution on the issue of the abducted Israeli soldiers; unfortunately the UN has no information on the fate of the IDF soldiers. Even after considerable debate, neither Pedersen nor the Ambassador changed the mind of the other.

SOUTH OF THE LITANI:
UNCONVINCED BY ISRAELI ALLEGATIONS

¶16. (C) The Ambassador asked whether Pedersen had received new information from the Israelis regarding Hizballah activities south of the Litani River that he would include in the 1701 report. Pedersen said that the Israeli claims were "mostly all talk." Noting that the Israelis had, in fact, shared specific examples of smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border, Pedersen said that he told his Israeli interlocutors that "your intelligence regarding the area south of the Litani must not be as good. Otherwise, why would you not share anything with me?" The Ambassador suggested that sources and methods might be more sensitive for that area. But neither UNIFIL nor the LAF have seen anything, Pedersen said. Gamely, he said that he shared the Israeli allegations with Berri, who said that the Israelis were "lying, lying, lying." Pedersen reported that UNIFIL now conducts 400 patrols every 24 hours, some with the LAF. How could Hizballah military activities and infrastructure

construction be as widespread as the Israelis claim and yet evade notice altogether? Asked how the Israelis responded to that question, Pedersen said that they claimed that Hizballah's tactics are changing, with more reliance on establishing weapons depots inside houses. But one doesn't hide long-range rockets in houses, Pedersen claimed.

¶ 17. (C) The Ambassador asked why the Israelis would wish to lie and potentially unravel the fragile consensus behind UNIFIL and UNSCR 1701. Saying that he never said the Israelis were lying, Pedersen said they probably exaggerate their arguments because Israel wants to expand the mandate of UNIFIL. He said that he tried but without success to explain to the Israelis that overreaching on the UNIFIL mandate risks losing UNIFIL altogether. The situation in south Lebanon is enormously improved over the situation a year ago, he told the Israelis, who he said responded with skepticism. The discussion about south Lebanon was at times "surreal," with the Israelis claiming not to understand the impact of what they wanted vis-a-vis UNIFIL mandate on Lebanese politics and thus on the ability of UNIFIL to remain. He asserted that, for all of their tough statements, the Israelis themselves are not certain of the intelligence regarding the situation south of the Litani. (Note: The meeting with Pedersen took place before the 6/17 firing of Katyusha rockets from South Lebanon into Israel; we raised this with Pedersen by phone as an example that the south is not as trouble-free as he indicated. End note.)

SYRIAN-LEBANESE BORDER:
WAITING FOR GOL INPUT

¶ 18. (C) For the situation regarding smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border, Pedersen said the concurred with the Israeli reports and appreciated the "clear" information provided by Israel. But, unfortunately, the Government of Lebanon has yet to provide any information about illegal cross-border activities. The UNSCR 1701 report would be more credible if it didn't have to rely so heavily on Israeli reports that will be automatically rejected by Syria, Qatar, and others. The Ambassador asked about using the information provided by PM Siniora to the UN's UNSCR 1559 envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen. Pedersen shook his head, saying that he wanted

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"new" information. The Ambassador noted that the information provided by Larsen was used in Larsen's presentation to the Security Council but had never been included in any formal UN report; moreover, it was new information since the last 1701 report. Not commenting on the Ambassador's points, Pedersen also said that he wished the Israelis would provide some "real-time" intelligence with the UN, for the UN to share with the Lebanese regarding arms smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border. "Let's test the Lebanese," Pedersen argued, by giving them the information they can act upon, embarrassing Hizballah and Syria in the process. If the GOL fails to act on such real-time information, that is important, too, he noted.

CHATAH: GOL TO PROVIDE INFORMATION
ON SYRIAN INTERFERENCE BY MID-WEEK

¶ 19. (C) Later in the day on 6/16, the Ambassador met with Mohamad Chatah, Senior Advisor to Siniora. Chatah acknowledged that the Lebanese needed to provide input to Pedersen on the 1701 report. Calling Internal Security Forces intelligence chief Wissam al-Hassan by phone, Chatah reported that Hassan should have a report prepared by Tuesday, "Wednesday at the latest," on Syrian interference and arms smuggling, included some "pretty dramatic stuff" related to the Nahr al-Barid fighting. PM Siniora would then address the Lebanese public with the allegations and also provide the evidence to the UN for the 1701 report. The Ambassador urged Chatah to follow through, noting that, too

many times, when the Arab League sends a delegation (as is happening this week), Siniora decides to postpone any initiatives, out of deference to requests from Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa. (The Ambassador later met with

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Minister of Communications Marwan Hamadeh and spoke by phone with MP Saad Hariri and Druse leader Walid Jumblatt, to urge them to intervene with Siniora to make sure that the GOL provided strong input on the Syrian-Lebanese border for the 1701 report.)

LEBANON TO PROPOSE TRI-PARTITE MECHANISM
TO ADDRESS BORDER SMUGGLING?

¶10. (C) Chatah said that Siniora was musing about asking the UN to set up some kind of tripartite committee for the Syrian-Lebanese border. This approach, he explained, would be parallel to the tripartite coordination chaired by UNIFIL between the GOL and Israelis. Politically, it would send a strong message to Syria's Lebanese allies that, suddenly, Syria and Israel were seen as equivalent problems. Such a mechanism with Syria would also provide cover for closer UNIFIL-sponsored coordination. Chatah said that Siniora calculated that Syria would also have a hard time rejecting participation; it would be embarrassing for Syria to tell the UNSYG no, if Ban Ki-Moon endorsed Siniora's suggestion. Previous ideas for dealing with the Syrian-Lebanese border -- UNIFIL deployment, European observers -- all led to saber-rattling from Syria, which claimed that such action no the Lebanese side would be considered a hostile act. But if a tripartite mechanism was established, Syria would probably feel forced to go along, however begrudgingly. Syria would probably be less inclined to seal its borders to legitimate trade under a tripartite mechanism

¶11. (C) Of course, Chatah added, Lebanon's written submission regarding the UNSCR report would also reiterate the regular Lebanese demands regarding a cessation to Israeli over flights UN custody for Sheba' Farms, Israeli withdrawal from northern Ghajjar, lack of Israeli disclosure regarding the location of cluster bomb use, and so forth.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) We will continue to press Siniora and the GOL on submitting to the UN as much information as possible regarding Syrian interference and arms smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border. But it occurs to us that the UN also has its own information now, from LIBAT (the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team). Besides what is reported reftel, we have heard that LIBAT documented with lots of telling examples the considerable problems along the border. If Pedersen argues that he has an obligation to include "new information" turned up by the UN itself (through

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its contractor) on Sheba' Farms, then certainly he also has an obligation to use the UN's new information on the Syrian-Lebanese border as well. We will push him on this. If LIBAT has details, they should be included in either the UNSCR 1701 report or the LIBAT report itself -- or both -- in order to help corner those who would have the international community do nothing regarding the Syrian-Lebanese border. Such compelling details will also help ensure that any tripartite border mechanism starts off by addressing specific examples rather than by engaging in endless, fruitless debate about whether or not there is a problem.

¶13. (C) As for Sheba' Farms, despite the relatively good news that Sheba' Farms is more modest in size than some Lebanese assert -- and having that modest size blessed in a UN report can help limit, but not eliminate, the expansionist claims -- we seem to be facing a no-win situation. If the

report comes out as Pedersen seems to be suggesting, then Hizballah will point to the international confirmation that it was right about Lebanese sovereignty claims all along. But if we intervene strongly with the UN now to get the language dropped, UN bureaucrats predictably more sympathetic to the Lebanese side will surely leak news of our intervention. Just as they did during last year's war, Hizballah will seize the opportunity to ask the Lebanese public about the real value of our support for Siniora. Our friends here will argue that we, Israel, Hizballah, and Syria seem to be inadvertently working in tandem to "prevent a solution" to Sheba' Farms. We hope that there are some quiet conversations already underway between USG and UN officials on the treatment of Sheba' Farms in the upcoming report.

FELTMAN